

Western Hemisphere

TURMOIL OVER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY OF BOLIVIAN JUNTA CHIEF

Rene Barrientos is determined to stay on as president of the Bolivian junta in spite of his presidential candidacy in the national elections now scheduled for 26 September. Barrientos fears that should he resign from the junta, his probable successor, commander of the armed forces General Ovando, would annul the elections and impose a military dictatorship.

Barrientos' resignation was requested in a cabinet meeting last month, probably on the basis of a constitutional requirement that candidates for election resign from public office 180 days before the election date. It is likely that this legal issue masked the feeling of certain officers that the military should stay out of politics. Barrientos refused to resign, and his stand has since been given a legal and public blessing in a press article by a prominent constitutional lawyer.

The relationship between Barrientos and General Ovando remains cordial on the surface. On the other hand both men are ambitious for the presidency, and their cooperation is based mainly on the respect of each for the other's assets, namely Barrientos' popularity with the civilian population and Ovando's standing with the armed forces as a respected commander.

Division within the armed forces over the two leaders does not exist as yet, but there is little doubt that opinion groups have developed over certain issues. In general, the debate is over the role of the armed forces in the life of the nation. Ovando is believed to be aiming at a condition where the military will be the final arbiter in Bolivian affairs. A Barrientos government would probably depend more upon civilians in the decision-making process.

With regard to the political parties, Barrientos still intends to seek an alignment with the left-center forces. He has broken with the rightist Bolivian Socialist Falange (FSB).

Approved for Release  
Date: 1 FEB 1998